



## **The Safely Surrendered Baby Law**

In January of 2002, a newborn baby was found alive in a trash can in Monrovia with its umbilical cord still attached. The infant, later known as “Baby Andrew,” was taken to a nearby hospital where he was examined and found to be in relatively good health. Soon afterwards, the 16-year-old girl who had given birth to the baby was arrested and charged with attempted murder and child endangerment.

The case caught the attention of the public and shined a light on the all-too-frequent issue of infant abandonment in Los Angeles County. In 2002, 13 infants were abandoned in the county, and of these eight died before they were found.

Since the passage of California’s Safely Surrendered Baby Law, new parents in dire situations have an easy way to save the life of their child. Under the law, parents may surrender their newborn infants at hospital emergency rooms or other designated sites within the first 72 hours after birth without facing criminal prosecution for child endangerment. In Los Angeles, babies can also be taken to any designated Los Angeles County fire station (Call 877-BABY SAFE to learn about a Safe Surrender site near you.). In 2002, the lives of 10 infants were saved because parents took advantage of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law. .

“The law is an easy way to save innocent lives,” said Evelyn V. Martinez, Executive Director of First 5 LA, which is working with a variety of agencies throughout the county to get the word out about the law.

Under the Safely Surrendered Baby Law, parental information is confidential and infants will receive the medical care they need. Los Angeles County’s Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) takes custody of these infants and moves them into adoptive homes as quickly as possible. Parents who have surrendered their infants have 14 days to reconsider their decision.

Although it’s easy to simply label the parents in infant abandonment cases as callous or irresponsible, the situation facing these parents is usually much more complex than that. Women who ultimately abandon their infants often conceal or deny their pregnancy out of fear of discovery or authority. Although these women can come from any ethnic or economic background, they usually do not receive any prenatal care and or give birth in a hospital or other medical environment.

As the continuing deaths of abandoned infants in Los Angeles County demonstrate, the Safely Surrendered Baby Law won’t do any good unless parents know about it. Parents need to know their options when making life or death decisions about their newborns. Anyone in the community can help: friends, grandparents, co-workers, service providers

or even acquaintances from church. The more people who know about the Safely Surrendered Baby Law, the more lives will be saved. It's that simple.

“Our goal is to not only better educate the public about this law, but more importantly, our goal must be zero babies thrown away,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, whose leadership has been essential in focusing attention on the law. A number of county agencies have been involved in spreading the word about the law, as well as First 5 LA, the Children's Planning Council, the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, First 5 LA, Infoline and other concerned members of the Los Angeles County community.

Those wanting information about specific Los Angeles County Safely Surrendered Baby sites in their neighborhoods should call (877) BABY-SAFE ((877) 725-5111). The program's website in Los Angeles County is [www.babysafela.org](http://www.babysafela.org). Visitors to the site can learn more about the law and the County's implementation efforts, as well as download print materials and find a designated Safe Surrender site near them. Los Angeles County Safe Surrender sites will display a sign with the Safe Surrender logo, which shows a picture of an extended arm holding a baby.

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